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Norms, Forms and Roles: Notes on the Concept of Norm (Not Just) in Neoformalist Poetics of Cinema

Norm as a tool of structural analysis and writing of aesthetically based history is a concept designed by Czech structuralist Jan Mukařovský in his articles and lectures from the 1930s. Although Mukařovský's concept has been elaborated mostly in the "domestic" fields of literary studies and structural aesthetics[1], it has also become part of a consistent research project in another country and another discipline. For a few decades, American film scholars, David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, have been handling this idea. This article follows three main goals, regarding the fact that in the academic work of Bordwell and Thompson *norm* appeared regularly throughout the 1980s, fulfilling several functions:

(1) The broadest aim of this article is to reconstruct specific roles the concept of norm played in the process of establishing the so-called *neoformalist poetics* approach, represented by Bordwell and Thompson. In other words, the article is going to outline the "centrifugal" functions of norm in polemics with other approaches as well as the "centripetal" ones in elaborating a particular research project and formulating the influential model of

[1] See Vodička, 1948, 1969; Sus, 1966, 1967; Steiner, 1976, pp. 90–100; Striedter, 1989, pp. 207–221; Chvatík, 1994, pp. 27–31; Sládek, 2015, pp. 202–207.

so-called classical Hollywood cinema. By returning to Jan Mukařovský's starting points, we will be able to more clearly understand how his concept was employed and transformed by neoformalist poeticians in order to solve the problems of film studies as an academic discipline on the one hand and problems in formulating concrete research projects on the other.

(2) The more particular goal of this article is to point out certain shifts in neoformalist poeticians' handling of the concept of norm after they formulated the classical Hollywood cinema model. The concept of norm was initially used by them as a tool for bottom-up research of the stylistic history of cinema, as a hollow category for its unbiased explanation. However, consequently it has also become a somewhat filled category applied rather top-down as an interpretative background for assessing its alternatives.

(3) That leads us to the final goal of this article: to answer the question why this re-assessment and interrogation of roles played by norm in neoformalist poetics matters now. By returning to the original concept of norm and by the treatise of its changing functions for film study, the article aims to remind us of the usefulness and flexibility of this research tool. As will be suggested in the last part of this article, we still know too little about stylistic and narrative histories of so-called *regional cinemas*. If we want to understand their stylistic and narrative history properly, the concept of norm is highly worthwhile – but only if is reached by bottom-up research as the hollow category for the unbiased explanation of certain cinematic phenomena.

So this article does not aim to re-evaluate the model of (classical) Hollywood cinema as *a* norm or *the* norm as was formulated by neoformalist poetics but rather to explain how *norm* served neoformalist poeticians in their attempt to understand (classical) Hollywood cinema instead[2]. Through reconstruction of the discussion and the research, we can re-evaluate the possibilities of norm just as the tool for a better understanding of regional cinemas' *historical poetics*.

Jan Mukařovský and (aesthetic) norms

Before we get to the work of Bordwell and Thompson, it is appropriate to at least briefly explain the role of the (aesthetic) norm in the writing of Jan

[2] This article is a fundamentally rewritten and extended version of my conference paper presented in 2011 in Prague and of the recently (eight years later) published form of this paper in the "Litikon" journal (Kokeš, 2019).

Mukařovský[3]. First of all, Mukařovský understood *norm* as a kind of *regulatory principle* which guides the individual artist towards his intended goal. As Peter Steiner wrote, the very choice to name such a principle as norm "was perhaps not a happy one, for the word 'norm' often refers to an obligatory rule and this is not what the [Prague] Structuralists had in mind. Further, in the realm of art any reference to norms brings to mind various schools of normative aesthetics which attempted to differentiate between art and non-art on the basis of fixed rules" (Steiner, 1976, p. 90). However, Mukařovský decided to use this label (influenced by contemporary legal theorists from Vienna and Brno; ibidem) and elaborated his concept for the first time in the 1935 article *Aesthetic Function and Aesthetic Norm as Social Facts* (Mukařovský, 1935), which became the basis for the famous 1936 monographic essay *Aesthetic Function, Norm, and Value as Social Facts* (Mukařovský, 1936; in English, Mukařovský, 1970). This development is significant because the original dichotomy of aesthetic function/aesthetic norm eventually became a trichotomy of aesthetic function/aesthetic norm/aesthetic value. In this trichotomy, however, the aesthetic norm remained slightly part of the original dichotomy (where it had had a regulatory role, which also had had an evaluative dimension) – and slightly became part of the new trichotomy (where it should only have a regulatory dimension, while evaluative aspects are covered by value). This indeterminate transitive role of the aesthetic norm is also recognisable from Mukařovský's final characteristic at the very end of the study, where he explains the aesthetic norm as:

> "The aesthetic norm, the regulator of the aesthetic function, is not an unchanging law, but a process which is constantly being renewed. By its distribution in strata of older and newer norms, lower and higher, etc., and by its evolutionary transformations, it is incorporated into social evolution, sometimes indicating exclusive membership in a given social milieu, sometimes individual shifts from stratum to stratum, or, finally, accompanying and signalling shifts in the total structure of society" (Mukařovský, 1970, p. 95).

What matters to us is that it is highly problematic to use the norm in these contexts as a fully functional tool in the history of (film) style. The focus of the essay is not to understand preferred solutions to artistic problems[4], but to offer a programme of a sociological approach to aesthetics. The aesthetic norm is

[3] He was not the only one who began to work with the term. Later Ernst Gombrich (Gombrich, 1971, pp. 81–98, 302) turned to *norm* independently, and the concept of norm can be found in the history of film style in the concept of Barry Salt (Salt, 2009 [originally 1984]). Neither of them referred to Mukařovský.

[4] More about the problem-solving model of stylistic research as well as about questions of conceptualising film style in Burnett, 2008.

only one part of a complex network of relationships between it, aesthetic function and aesthetic value. Moreover, as such, the norm is primarily an aesthetic one, and the background for its understanding is not the other types of norms with which the creators come into contact. Although Mukařovský thinks about parallel norms (Mukařovský, 1970, pp. 55–58), he does not elaborate them further and remains at a high level of theoretical generality. The proposed system is undoubtedly impressive and abounds with many unique ideas, *but*… On the one hand, there are several logical flaws (see: Fořt, 2006; Przylipiak, 2019). On the other hand, if we separate the concept of norm from this system and use it as a tool for writing stylistic history, it would lead to a significant shift in Mukařovský's argumentation.

In other words, if we want to understand the ways and likely reasons of dealing with the concept of norm in the texts of David Bordwell, it should be remembered that his writing about it was not originally based on the above-cited study. Bordwell's source material was the short article *The Aesthetic Norm*, prepared by Jan Mukařovský in 1937 for IXth International Congress of Philosophy in Paris (Mukařovský, 1937) and translated into English by John Burbank and Peter Steiner in 1978 (Mukařovský, 1978, pp. 49–56)[5]. Just this short article by Mukařovský offers a sufficiently open and at the same time efficient enough model of a norm to be able to serve the aims of the history of film style or, more generally, the historical poetics of cinema.

It offers a dynamic tool that (1) can explain the construction of particular film work. Mukařovský writes: "The structure of a work of art has the nature of an unstable equilibrium of different types of norms, aesthetic and others, which obtain in the work and are applied in part positively, in part negatively" (ibidem, p. 56). The concept of norm, as proposed here, also has potential to explain (2) the reasons for the construction of the artwork, depending on the specific empirical conditions of its production at a particular time and place. Mukařovský offers a categorisation of norms that can be applied in an artwork. The final artwork is thus the result of negotiation, confrontation of heterogeneous norms: "Such a confrontation of heterogeneous norms is, of course, felt as a conflict but as a desirable conflict, which is a part of the intention from which the work arose" (ibidem, p. 52). Surely, Mukařovský does not speak in this text about the empirical conditions of the art-working or about artworks as a result of solving specific artistic problems. However, it is not contrary to his arguments to think of several types of norms as a set of particular constraints that the artist is con-

[5] Bordwell does not refer to *Aesthetic Function, Norm, and Value as Social Facts* until later in *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Bordwell, 1985, p. 349), where he selects only those citations that are in accordance to what Mukařovský wrote in *The Aesthetic Norm*.

fronted with. Finally, this short article offers tools to (3) understand the long-term influence of norms from a historical perspective:

> "We can (…) consider as proven that the interrelations among all these norms, which function as instruments for artistic devices, are too complex, too differentiated, and too unstable for the positive value of the work to be able to appear as virtually identical with the perfect fulfilment of all norms obtained in it. The history of art has much more the nature of a perpetual revolt against the norm. There are, of course, periods tending toward maximally attainable harmony and stability; are usually called periods of classicism. On the other hand, there are periods when art seeks out maximal lability in the structure of artistic works" (Mukařovský, 1978, p. 54).

In contrast to the firm, highly complex theoretical system of the first article, in this case, Mukařovský offers a very dynamic and very flexible analytical tool. Moreover, even in its suggestion of so-called anthropological dimension of norms, the article to some extent compliant with some later considerations of the so-called cognitive perspective in film studies, of which David Bordwell became an exponent (Bordwell, Staiger, Thompson, 1985, pp. 7–9; Bordwell, 1985, 1989).

Roles of norms as arguments in polemics

It can be said that David Bordwell, since the beginning of his academic career in the 1970s, has been somewhat sceptical about certain tendencies of then-prevailing "continental" film theorising, though not as much as a few years later. Although Bordwell did not publish the first of his fairly critical articles until the early 1980s (Bordwell, 1981, 1983), he drew up his idea of a more appropriate direction of theoretical thinking about cinema as early as the late 1970s, when he co/published two methodologically ambitious texts.

First, together with Kristin Thompson, he wrote the first edition of *Film Art: An Introduction* (Bordwell, Thompson, 1979). This resulted from several years of their teaching introductory courses (ibidem, p. iv), in which they gradually developed their idea of the right direction of film education (cf. Bordwell, 1976). One of the points in which this book represented an alternative was its distinct following of the assumptions, analytical tools and terminology

of Russian literary formalism[6]. Second, in the same year, Bordwell published his first more systematic commentary on the state and aims of film researching: *Criticism, Theory, and the Particular* (Bordwell, 1979) as the editorial for a special issue of "Film Criticism". In it, he indicated worry "that most critical analyses produce no general knowledge" (ibidem, p. 1). He suggested where research should go: to analyse film form, to historical perspective, but above all to *norms*:

> "To make criticism concrete, we need to construct a conception of the dominant ways in which films are put together and understood in certain times and places. The elaboration of such models has barely begun, but some precedents can guide us. The principle of a norm was a central feature of Russian Formalist and Czech Structuralist poetics. Every work, it was argued, had to be situated with respect to the reigning canons of artistic practice" (ibidem, p. 5).

In an endnote, we then read that "[t]he most thorough discussion of the concept of norm is Jan Mukařovský, 'The Aesthetic Norm'" (ibidem, p. 8)[7]. Already at an early stage in Bordwell's historical research, as well as in its polemics with contemporary film theorising, we can find Mukařovský's concept of norms as a fundamental argument in the debate on the direction of film research.

In his later programmatic contributions from the first half of the 1980s, Bordwell followed a distinct rhetorical tactic. Taking a relatively established analytical approach to cinema (e.g. Christian Metz's theory of codes and subcodes, textual analysis, or *mise-en-scène* criticism), he appreciated the research possibilities of this approach, critically analysed it – and then subsequently presented *his* ap-

[6] Admittedly, Russian formalism was extensively debated during the first half of the 1970s in continental theoretical reflections on cinema, especially in the British journal "Screen". However, the formalism remained only one of a series of theoretical and methodological impulses, which the emerging field of film studies took from other disciplines. Film scholars tested their potential, combined them with other impulses – and then abandoned them. For example, Boris Eichenbaum's application of the concept of inner speech (e. g. Willemen, 1974) and Vladimir J. Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* (e. g. Wollen, 1976; Erens, 1977) have been discussed and applied. Thus, the pursuit with which Bordwell and Thompson followed and further developed Russian formalism (and Czech structuralism) was indeed an alternative.

[7] Although we can find a similar reference in the 1981 article *Textual Analysis, etc.* (Bordwell, 1981, p. 129), Bordwell was probably not quite sure for a long time to whom the concept of norms was attributed. We can suppose this not only from the careful wording in these articles but also from his later essay *Lowering the Stakes*. Bordwell also speaks about norms primarily concerning Russian formalism. It is particularly apparent in the footnote where (regarding Peter Steiner's essay; Steiner, 1982) Bordwell writes: "It seems evident to me that a thoroughgoing Formalist account of cinema will have to take account of the contributions of Czech Structuralism, especially in the domain of research into historical norms" (Bordwell, 1983, p. 16). This error is also because he and Kristin Thompson based their re/interpretations of both formalistic and Czech structuralist texts on a considerably limited number of English-language translations.

proach as its improvement, as its modification, which, however, takes into account the historical perspective (e.g. Bordwell, 1981, 1983, 1985A).

Nevertheless, Bordwell's rhetoric has grown to sarcastic criticism with the gradual verification of the functionality and effectiveness of his approach, and his assault culminated in the 1980s with a biting article *Historical Poetics of Cinema* (Bordwell, 1989A). In the first half of this fully programmatic article, he primarily introduced the traditions of poetics, its possible classification, the potential for film research and the research goals that it wants to follow with its poetics of cinema (ibidem, pp. 369–385). However, in the second half, he unexpectedly put his position in very striking contrast with a certain trend of film studies. The trend which – according to Bordwell – "treats cinema study as an instance of the study of the 'human subject,' employing tenets based on Saussurean semiotics, Lacanian psychoanalysis, Althusserian Marxism, and Barthesian textual theory" (ibidem, p. 385). Bordwell calls it *SLAB theory* (ibidem). According to him, instead of asking research questions, the representatives of SLAB theory put doctrine at the centre of interest, they do not conduct systematic research, and they use concepts to construct interpretative narratives instead of using concepts to construct explanatory propositions (ibidem, pp. 385–392). Notwithstanding, it results from the argumentative construction of the article that Bordwell did not primarily attempt the scholarly disqualification of his opponents. Preferably, he reinforced the rhetorical tactics I explained above: the overwhelming criticism of opponents served him as a highly useful comparative tool to demonstrate the benefits of his proposed poetic alternative. Historical poetics of cinema puts research problems and research questions at the centre of interest, conducting systematic research and using concepts to construct explanatory propositions.

If we go back in time, Bordwell and Thompson have improved and examined their alternative to SLAB theory since the second half of the 1970s. Kristin Thompson's attitude can be considered dominantly analytical. At the centre of this attitude is, as much as possible, sensitive "centripetal" analysis of the film work, from which the more general "centrifugal" problems are approached. She called it *neoformalist analysis* in her published dissertation (Thompson, 1981), the programmatic essay in "Iris" (Thompson, 1983, pp. 42–49) and her book of eleven detailed formalistic film analyses *Breaking the Glass Armor* (Thompson, 1988). However, such a label is problematic because the same attitude can be observed in several of her 1970s analyses (e.g. Thompson, 1976, 1977, 1979), where she had *not yet* worked with formalistic terminology. On the other hand, she was evolving the same attitude in her 1990s analyses

(Thompson, 1999), where she *no longer* worked with formalistic terminology. However, if we perceive her neo/formalism as a research *perspective* rather than as a set of conceptual tools within a particular *approach* (Thompson, 1983; Thompson, 1988, pp. 3–46), it may be referred to as *neoformalist film analysing*. A more general aesthetic variant of it can be observed in the writing of Bordwell, who called his attitude *poetics of cinema* (Bordwell, 1983, 1985, 1988) and usually approaches the analysis of particular film work(s) from the solving of more general "centrifugal" problems such as particular narrative or stylistic techniques, diverse narrative or stylistic traditions, the role of authorship in the context of a specific mode of production, et cetera. In the most elaborate version, it is then possible to consider the research perspective of the *historical poetics of the cinema* (Bordwell, Staiger, Thompson, 1985; Bordwell, 1989A). However, in the light of considerable simplification, we can think of all these attitudes as three variants of one perspective or rather a research programme with comparable points of departure: *the neoformalist poetics*.

How does it all relate to the concept of norm we are discussing? Bordwell wrote in the study *Historical Poetics of Cinema* that both historical poetics and neoformalism are:

> "associated with research she [Thompson] and I [Bordwell] have done over the past dozen years or so. *The trend* derives principally from Slavic poetics, in particular the Russian and Czech thinkers, but it is also influenced by the more or less oblique ‹return to Slavic theory› one finds in Todorov, Genette, the 1966-1970 Barthes, and contemporary Israeli poeticians like Meir Sternberg. [...] Neoformalism presumes that one cannot discover factual answers to questions about films› construction without carefully devising analytical concepts appropriate to these questions. [...] In sum, *neoformalist poetics* makes theoretically defined, open-ended, corrigible, and falsifiable claims" (Bordwell, 1989A, pp. 378–379; emphasis by RDK).

Thus, in this article, neoformalist poetics presents a set of assumptions and a way of asking questions. According to Bordwell, neoformalist poetics is sincerely empirical and emphasises research into the facts of films. Bordwell understands its hypotheses are grounded:

> "in a theoretical *activity* rather than a fixed theory. This theorizing moves across various levels of generality and deploys various concepts and categories. It does not presume global propositions to which the researcher pledges unswerving allegiance and which automatically block our noticing recalcitrant data" (ibidem, pp. 380; emphasis by DB).

At the centre of the research interest of neoformalist poetics is the effort to answer the questions as best as possible and thus to achieve distinctly formulated and empirically testable knowledge. In other words, neoformalist poetics wants to offer *explanations* instead of *explications* (ibidem, p. 375). It, accordingly, provides flexible definitions and deploys "hollow" categories and "hollow" principles. And what is one of the essential "hollow" principles? Yes, "that of norms" (ibidem, p. 381).

The postulates of the Russian formalists allowed Bordwell and Thompson to offer their attitude as an alternative one. Both gradually developed their concept of film form as a system of interconnected elements as well as turning to other formalistic concepts which they have refined, adapted and expanded, such as the syuzhet and the fabula, the motivations or the dominant. They managed to unite a largely heterogeneous field of Russian formalism (cf. Steiner, 1984, pp. 15–43) into a systemised and coherent approach to cinema (Thompson, 1981, pp. 8–60; Thompson 1988, pp. 3–46). Nevertheless, how can this approach be effectively dynamised from a historical perspective? Shlovsky's concept of *defamiliarisation* (ostranenie), which played a vital role in the programmatically conceived version of neoformalist film analysis by Kristin Thompson (Thompson, 1981, 1988), seemed to be one possible key.

Frank Kessler describes in his article *Ostranenie, Innovation, and Media History* three ways in which Kristin Thompson used the term defamiliarisation in *Breaking the Glass Armor*. Firstly, it offers her a methodological weapon, when "it allows her to eschew what she calls a 'communications model of art' proposing instead an approach that places the artwork in a realm that is different from other cultural phenomena because it must be perceived in a specific way" (Kessler, 2010, p. 64). Secondly, it offers her an analytical tool because "it becomes a central concept for the analysis of artistic form" (ibidem, p. 64). Thirdly, "it is important for the neoformalist approach in that it makes it necessary to look at the individual artwork in its historical context in order to be able to appreciate the way in which it defamiliarizes habitualized formal patterns and devices" (ibidem, p. 64). However, Kessler also draws attention to the relative mechanicality of this concept (ibidem, p. 67). After all, Peter Steiner, concerning Sklovsky's concept of formalism as a machine, has already explained the problems that arise when trying to use them to study literary history (Steiner, 1984, pp. 44–67)[8].

[8] For more about neoformalist applications of Shklovsky's concept of defamiliarisation (ostranenie) see the very short book *Der Neoformalismus und das Konzept der Verfremdung in der Filmkunst* (Keller, 2015).

On the other hand, David Bordwell has never dealt with the concept of defamiliarisation explicitly, let alone systematically in the context of his historical poetics (see also Kessler, 2010, p. 64). Indeed, it was the already discussed Mukařovský article *The Aesthetic Norm* (Mukařovský, 1978, pp. 49–56), which provided him with a much more competent device for understanding the transformations of film form in a historical perspective. As was explained above, in 1979, the potential of norms as a tool of historical research had been cautiously suggested by Bordwell, while he only mentioned Mukařovský in an endnote (Bordwell, 1979). In 1983, Bordwell had already put norms at the forefront of the historical poetics of cinema project, although without mentioning Mukařovský (Bordwell, 1983). In texts published in 1985, however, Bordwell not only openly accepted the norm as Mukařovský's concept, but he elaborated it and applied it comprehensively. We go back to the late 1970s and early 1980s when Bordwell, Thompson and Janet Staiger were working intensively on far-reaching research – and Mukařovský's norm played an essential role in this.

Roles of norms in research methodology

The book *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*, written by these three authors, represents a maximalist attempt to demonstrate the achievement of the neoformalist poetics' ambitions, as explained above. On the one hand, the authors scrupulously shot-by-shot stylistically and narratively analysed two *large* samples of films (unbiased and biased). On the other hand, the authors conducted extensive archive research, they explored the impact of screenwriting manuals on film practice, and they became familiar with film production practices (Bordwell, Staiger, Thompson, 1985).

In the opening chapter, Bordwell writes:

> "My goal here is to identify, at several levels of generality, to what extent Hollywood filmmaking adheres to integral and limited stylistic conventions. […] The point is simply that Hollywood films constitute a fairly coherent aesthetic tradition which sustains individual creation. […] Before there are auteurs, there are constraints; before there are deviations, there are norms. […] The first, and crucial step is to assume that Classical filmmaking constitutes an aesthetic system that can characterize salient features of the individual work. The system cannot determine every minute detail of the work, but it isolates preferred practices and sets limits upon invention. The problem is, in other words, that of defining what Jan Mukařovský has called aesthetic *norms*" (ibidem, pp. 3–4)

Mukařovský's concept of norms has thus become a fundamental methodological tool for the historical research of Hollywood cinema, which is further systematically elaborated: "Mukařovský's work helps us [authors of the book] move toward defining the Hollywood cinema as an aesthetic system. Plainly, the Hollywood style has functioned historically as a set of norms" (ibidem, p. 5). In so doing, Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson offered a new conception of *classical cinema*, which acquired a specific and, above all, non-evaluative meaning – which is derived, among other things, from Mukařovský's approach. Bordwell writes that "it might seem rash to claim that Hollywood's norms have not drastically changed since around 1920, but Mukařovský points out that periods of 'classicism' tend toward harmony and stability" (ibidem, p. 5). Mukařovský's (implied) concept of style, based on a set of different types of norms applied to artwork, leads to Bordwell's claim, which is again in compliance with that of Mukařovský: no artwork, and therefore no Hollywood film, perfectly embody all norms. "No Hollywood film *is* the classical system; each is an 'unstable equilibrium' of classical norms" (Bordwell, Staiger, Thompson, 1985, p. 5).

Bordwell not only gradually assesses the usefulness of Mukařovský's concept, but each of his relatively abstract stimuli systematically develops and applies consistently to thinking about such a complex and considerable quantity as Hollywood cinema till the 1960s. Bordwell does not suffice only with the aesthetic norms but develops Mukařovský's idea of operating different types of norms and presupposes their mutual interference:

> "As all these points indicate, the chief virtue of Mukařovský's work is to enable us to think of a group film style not as a monolith but as a complex system of specific forces in dynamic interaction. […] Any group style offers a *range* of alternatives. Classical filmmaking is not, strictly speaking, formulaic; there is always another way to do something. […] At the same time, the [Hollywood] style remains a unified system because the paradigm offers *bounded* alternatives" (ibidem, p. 5).

However, if the classical style is a set of norms, Bordwell maintains it is necessary to offer ways to differentiate levels of generality: (a) devices, (b) systems (narrative logic, cinematic time, cinematic space), (c) relations of systems. Bordwell assumes that "the total style can be defined as the relation of those systems to each other" (ibidem, p. 6). It is these three levels of generality, combined with the concept of norms, which then allow the authors of the book to study the stability and change of style from a historical perspective. How? Whereas at the second and third level – i.e. systems and relations of systems – Bordwell in his reconstruction of the classical stylistic paradigm observes

strong historical continuity, at the level of film devices the most significant changes proceed. For particular effects in the arrangement of narrative causality, time and space and relationships between them, different devices were dominantly used in different periods. According to Bordwell, however, within a self-regulatory set of governing classical norms, all of these devices were subordinated to the so-called functional equivalence principle: "Basic principles govern not only the elements in the paradigm but also the ways in which the elements may function" (ibidem, p. 5). In particular, new devices such as film sound or Technicolor film functionally replace other devices without altering the set of norms at higher levels of systems and relations of systems – and stability is maintained.

Furthermore, it is necessary to consider that the basis for the historical periodisation of this one history of style and narrative was not *only* the norms but *also* the film industry itself. More particularly, it was the Hollywood film industry as "the most proximate and pertinent institution for creating, regulating, and maintaining those norms[, which] is not to say that film style and mode of production march across decades in perfect synchronization" (ibidem, p. 9). As we will see, the norms were just one aspect of the game, and the profound explanation of the film industry as a specific mode of production is at least as groundbreaking as the explanation of the role of norms for this industry – and its community of filmmakers. They "analyzed the tight interaction among sectors of the Hollywood film industry. […] [T]here could be rapid communication between various production sectors–filmmakers, technology firms, supply houses, and coordinating bodies like the Academy. This interchange facilitated stylistic change through innovations of sound recording, lighting, lenses, and the like" (Bordwell, 2016, p. 26). So, synchronic as well as diachronic understanding and explaining of the standard functioning of this system of relations at the levels of (a) the film industry, (b) the filmmaking community, and (c) the constructional principles by which film works are built has been another essential dimension of this research. Concerning these questions, they asked what the self-regulative system of the governing principles of Hollywood Cinema as an aesthetic system is. In other words, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* is explaining its creative matrix *not just* as a set of norms, but as *the classical norm* of its kind. Logically, the basis of this aesthetic research of this *norm* should not be an aesthetically exceptional film, but *an ordinary film*.

Noticeably, in defining this research goal, David Bordwell was inspired by Roman Jakobson, Mukařovský's friend and colleague from the Prague Lin-

guistic Circle. Bordwell quotes from an interview with Jakobson: "[I believe] that a very important thing in analyzing trends in the cinema or the structure of a film, is the necessity of considering the base, the *background* of the spectator's habits. What films is the spectator used to seeing? To what forms is he accustomed?" (cited in: Bordwell, Staiger, Thompson, 1985, p. 10, cf. Jakobson, 1973). Bordwell adds: "My analysis of the norms of the classical style thus gives privileged place not to the aberrant film that breaks or tests the rules but to the quietly conformist film that tries simply to follow them" (Bordwell, Staiger, Thompson, 1985, p. 10). Thus, if Jan Mukařovský's concept of norms provided a fundamental methodological tool for aesthetically based historical research for the book, Roman Jakobson indirectly helped refine its framework research questions. Nevertheless, to what extent and in what ways have aesthetic norms been influenced by other sets of norms? It is evident that the aim is not to reconstruct the argumentation and summarise the conclusions of this lengthy book, but again to point out *some* of the roles played by the concept of norms in its explanations.

Roles of norms in the results of this research

Although Bordwell initially summarises Mukařovský's own differentiation of norms and tries to find empirical cinematic parallels for them (Bordwell, Staiger, Thompson, 1985, pp. 4–5)[9], all three authors apparently avoid using these categories in the rest of the book. They rely on the context of argumentation from which the characteristics of discussed norms should emerge, instead.

Nevertheless, for the sake of the further interpretation of their rhetorical tactics, I offer as an analytical tool my own typology of norms with which filmmakers deal. From the perspective of the historical poetics we can understand them as a system of concentric circles – proceeding from the "central" constraints primarily artistic to the "outer" constraints primarily non-artistic: (1) *Aesthetic norms* refer to the set of preferred artistic solutions of particular creative problems at a given time and place. (2) *Artistic norms*, on the other hand, represent rather long-standing constructive traditions, whether within

[9] Mukařovský speaks about material norms, technical norms, practical norms, and norms of aesthetic traditions (Mukařovský, 1978, pp. 53–54). However, this differentiation is relatively unclear as well as it is its relation to the very concept of the aesthetic norm. It is not apparent from his argumentation, whether they are other types of norms than the aesthetic norm, or they are part of it. But as Mukařovský scholar Ondřej Sládek told me in personal conversation, this typology is broadly considered to be a working proposal rather than a definitive taxonomy. Although Bordwell did not offer his own typology in this book, he proposed a kind of differentiation in his other 1980s works: *extrinsic norms* and *intrinsic norms* (Bordwell, 1985, pp. 150–155; Bordwell, 1988). However, a more detailed discussion of this proposal and the degree of its equivalence to Mukařovský's original concept is too complex to be dealt with in this article.

the same art form (in our case cinema) or other art forms (e.g. theatre, literature, painting, architecture, music, comics et cetera, but also diverse folklore traditions). These can be specific schemata (cf. Gombrich, 1960), but even more complex sets of techniques (e.g. genres, art schools, art movements). As a particular type of artistic norms, we can see authorial norms. The set of involved artistic norms may follow aesthetic norms, but may also represent a radical alternative to them. (3) *Industrial norms* we can see as a set of norms shared by a specific filmmaking community at a given time and place. They are in the way of a division of labour, shooting plans, star systems et cetera. They take the form of economic (budgetary) constraints that filmmakers have to adapt to. They also take the form of the supposed distribution circuit into which their film is to enter. The specific area of industrial norms is represented by the technology options available to filmmakers at a given time and place – and preferred ways of dealing with them. We can speak about film prints, cameras, lighting equipment, backdrops, camera dollies and cranes, sound systems et cetera. (4) *Social norms* then stand at the most general level in the typology. Society influences the filmmakers, and thus it is a wide range of impulses and limitations which, in different filmmaking traditions and at different times, operate with varying intensity, for example in the fields of ideology, morality, religious beliefs, politics, nationalism or demands formulated by authors of various forms of reviews.

Yet, the real effectivity of such a categorisation as a historical tool, of course, will only appear in particular research. However, it stays beyond the ambition of this text, who it is going to serve instead as the heuristic tool for meta-analysis of ways by which Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson explained a particular set of restraints and relations. In other words, the previous chapters suggested how they explain the ways in which classical Hollywood cinema, while working with aesthetic norms, simultaneously involves the constraints represented by industrial norms. However, let us take a closer look at some of their research and rhetoric tactics.

The stylistic and narrative analysis of their unbiased and biased sample might have led Bordwell and Thompson to some questions: Well, we revealed sets of the preferred creative options how to construct narrative logic, time and space, how to distribute information, how to guide viewers' attention, et cetera. But why? Why were these and not other options preferred? On the other hand, Janet Staiger was an expert on the historiography of cinema as an industry, cinema as a mode of production, cinema as a specific kind of division of labour. From her perspective, it is possible to analyse sets of particular conditions,

the functioning of the filmmaking community, the internal discussions of this community about aesthetic norms or what is the standard of quality film.

In this interaction of diverse research perspectives, we can see what makes *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* ground-breaking in its treatment of the concept of norms. Let us suppose that Bordwell and Thompson had offered "only" a set of aesthetic norms or the interpretation of classical cinema as one complex aesthetic norm. Even in this case, we could still consider the classical norm as a kind of main analytical background for a better understanding of such systems of norms which may be seen as an alternative to the classical one (cf. Thompson, 1988, p. 21–25). Mukařovský's concept of norm itself would undoubtedly offer some ways how to structure these findings – but to no small extent, Bordwell and Thompson would primarily develop some of the analytical assumptions about the aesthetic preferences of Hollywood cinema they had already formulated during the 1970s (Bordwell, Thompson, 1976; Bordwell, 1977; Bordwell, Thompson, 1979).

In other words, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* shed new light on the topic at least for two main reasons. First, the authors regarded interaction of different types of norms at the level of analysis of a large sample of films. They endeavoured to use a so-called unbiased sample, so the central sample of one hundred analyzed films was generated as randomly it was possible. Second, the authors regarded several complementary research perspectives when thinking about all these norms. At the same time, these two reasons invoked heated polemics on the one hand (cf. King, 1986; Britton, 1989; Altman, 1992; Cowie, 1998; Ray, 2001 [1988]; see also: Przylipiak, 2019)[10] and initiated partially critical, but well-considered research projects on the other (cf. Lastra, 2000; Keil, 2002; Maltby, 2003; Grieveson, Kramer, 2004, esp. pp. 271–278; Keating, 2010, 2019; loosely Crisp, 1997).

Moreover, the authors of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* were well aware of these aspects of their research and explicitly commented on them. In this context, Bordwell and Staiger mentioned the programmatic article by Russian formalists Yuri Tynjanov and Roman Jakobson entitled *Problems in the Study of Language and Literature* (1928). Although Bordwell and Staiger did so in connection with technological aspects of industrial norms, the cited words of Tynjanov and Jakobson can be generalised to the overall handling of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* with Mukařovský's concept of norms in a historical perspective. They have indicated the limits of an autonomous history of style since the disclosure of the immanent laws (i. e. aesthetic norms) of the history of cinema do not explain

[10] For summarisation of some of these polemic arguments see Jenkins, 1995.

> "the rate of change or the choice of a particular evolutionary path from among those which are in theory possible, since the immanent laws of literary (linguistic) evolution represent only an indeterminate equation whose solution may be any of a number (albeit limited) of possible solutions, but not necessarily a single one. The question of the specific evolutionary path chosen, or at least of the dominant, can be answered only by analyzing the correlation between the literary series and other historical series" (cited in: Bordwell, Staiger, Thompson, 1985, p. 248)[11].

In terms of industrial norms, Hollywood cinema thus operated as a systematically, vertically as well as horizontally, organised model of a collective working, production mechanisms and economic factors. Hollywood film was a highly regulated mode of production, in which "once the device had proven its narrative virtues, it was rationalized economically" (ibidem, p. 84). If it is true, can we still talk about researching an aesthetic system given that its aesthetic functions seem to be subordinate to the demands of the production system that was intended to make money? We can; because, according to Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, it was actually the classical style just like the aesthetic system which corrected how the production system would work – and although modes of production have changed, the classical style persisted. As Bordwell and Staiger explain:

> "Within the mode of production, the tensions of standardization and differentiation, the increase in specialization, and the tendency of Hollywood's institutions to focus energy and capital toward a controlled uniformity all crucially depended upon the norms of the classical style. Similarly, while technological change [i.e. industrial norms; rem. RDK] had to be economically beneficial in the long run, the directions and functions of such change were strongly contained by stylistic premises. Classical norms dictated how cameras, lighting, laboratory equipment, sound recording, deep-focus cinematography, color, and widescreen could be introduced and used" (ibidem, p. 367).

[11] They used translation from "Russian Poetics in Translation", 1977, No. 4, which I do not have. For juxtaposition, I offer another translation of the same part with slightly different accents: "A disclosure of the immanent laws […] do not allow us to explain the tempo of evolution or the chosen path of evolution when several, theoretically possible, evolutionary paths are given. This is owing to the fact that the immanent laws (i.e. aesthetic norms) of literary (and, corresponding, linguistic) evolution form an indeterminate equation; although they admit only a limited number of possible solutions, they do not necessarily specify a unique solution. The question of a specific choice of path, or at least of the dominant, can be solved only through an analysis of the correlation between the literary series and other historical series" (Tynjanov, Jakobson, 1980, pp. 30–31).

On the other hand, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* also offers numerous discoveries grounded primarily in the realm of aesthetic explanations. Academic knowledge about the range and sorts of preferred solutions of particular artistic problems with which Hollywood filmmakers operated has been widely corrected, significantly expanded, and functionally explained. The authors thus answered many new questions both in the perspective of synchronic poetics (what aesthetic norms persisted across decades) and in the perspective of diachronic poetics (how and why was the classical style as a set of aesthetic norms formulated during the 1910s). A particular category of such discoveries is represented by the explanations of the interactions between the classical aesthetic norm and (a) other influential sets of artistic norms, (b) a set of social norms in Hollywood cinema.

As has been said, Bordwell explains Hollywood cinema as a representation of a period of classicism, according to Mukařovský as a period tending toward maximally attainable harmony and stability. Thus, if alternative systems of *artistic norms* (e.g. by the entrance of films of such tradition into American distribution or by the employing of foreign filmmakers, often immigrants) influenced the classical aesthetic norm, this influence was, according to Bordwell, highly selective and had the form of effective assimilation. Let us look at the impact of the artistic norms of German Expressionist cinema, for example. American filmmakers imitated expressionist lighting, cinematography, or special effects in the 1920s, but this assimilation was selective. In other words, it has given some techniques a specific function within the classical aesthetic norm. For example, this function could be a genre one:

> low-key lighting was used "for mystery, distorted perspectives in horror films, and odd angles for shock effects. [...] Most important, German Expressionist techniques for indicating character subjectivity were seized upon for momentary, intensified inserts. [...] Other formal traits of Expressionist cinema – the more episodic and open-ended narrative, the entirely subjective film, or the slower tempo of story events – were not imitated by Hollywood; the classical style took only what could extend and elaborate its principles without challenging them" (Bordwell, Staiger, Thompson, 1985, p. 73).

The artistic norms of German Expressionism thus potentially evolved a set of classical film norms on the level of devices, but at the same time, only those that strengthened the relations of systems (causality, time and space) were selected and assimilated to maintain functions of the classical style.

Furthermore, if we consider *social norms* as we defined them above, an inherent part of them will be an effect of ideology. According to Bordwell, there is need to "recognize the specific formal operations through which classical principles reinforce dominant ideological positions" (ibidem, 82) such as goal-oriented and psychologically defined characters, through an "objective" and straightforward order of the story or a coherent spatial arrangement in the theatrical tradition. All these factors clustered around assumptions about the nature of social existence and narrative resolution could work to transcend the social conflict represented in the film, often by displacing it into the individual, the couple, the family, or the communal good (ibidem, 82). However, Bordwell's explanation of how social norms influence aesthetic norms is much simpler than the previous one of how artistic norms influence them. The analysis of an ideology serves Bordwell primarily to grasp the specific research problem of happy endings in the classical era, although he construes (surprisingly) its arguments in reverse: happy endings do not necessarily need to be explained but can be an *explanation* instead. Indeed, if the Hollywood style is being attacked as ideologically uniform, Bordwell indirectly suggests that when these social norms have been confronted with the application of aesthetic norms, such uniformity might have been momentarily broken down. How? With the help of happy endings:

> "If the ending, especially the happy ending, is inadequately motivated, then the film creates a possibly productive split of story from narration. By including an ending that runs counter to what went before, deviant narration indicates extratextual, social, historical limits [i.e. social norms; rem. RDK] to its authority. […] [Some films] tend to foreground the arbitrary conventionality of the ending and can even raise ideological questions. […] The happy ending may be there, but to some extent the need for it is criticized. […] We can understand those [problematic] moments only by recognizing the norms operating in the Hollywood cinema […]" (ibidem, 83).

In the above-mentioned monographic essay *Aesthetic Function, Norm, and Function as Social Facts*, Jan Mukařovský classifies film *not* as art, but as one of the transitional phenomena "which are basically rooted outside of the aesthetic realm, but which tend toward art without wholly becoming art" (Mukařovský, 1970, p. 12). According to Mukařovský, it is because of its "industrialness" determined by purely commercial considerations and as such film must "instantly and passively absorb every newly discovered improvement of its technological basis" (ibidem, p. 12). Mukařovský argues with the example "with the rapid

tempo of innovation in talking motion pictures, which have in a very brief time destroyed the bases for artistic development established by the silent film" (ibidem, p. 12–13). Ironically, the authors of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* unintentionally used Mukařovský's own terminology *to prove he was wrong*[12]. In their explanation, any consideration of stylistic changes due to the influence of technological constraints must take into account their *timing* and *causation* (Bordwell, Staiger, Thompson, 1985, p. 248). The immanent development of Hollywood film must be related to other historical series because this – in Mukařovský's words – has never been passive. While any technological change should serve the conditions of long-term economic benefit (industrial norms), it has been governed mainly by the requirements of classical aesthetic norms, which makes Hollywood cinema *an aesthetic system*.

Some final remarks to following applications of the classical norm

As was suggested above, many of the premises, concepts, arguments, hypotheses and resulting conclusions how *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* proposed, have been criticised and widely discussed[13]. However, it is beyond the scope of this article to summarise or analyse these objections and counter-arguments, let alone contribute to the discussion with my own objections and counter-arguments. Why? On the one hand, this article's research question was *not* to appraise the legitimacy of the polemical position that Bordwell and Thompson held during the 1980s. On the other hand, it also did not ask how plausible the conclusions reached by Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* were – nor what they perhaps omitted, overlooked and misrepresented. No, the set of research questions this article has (so far) asked were: How did Mukařovský's concept of norm get into one long-term research programme of neoformalist poetics? What role did the concept play in self-definition of the neoformalist poetics research programme in contrast with other research programmes? What role did the concept play in formulating and executing one particular research project under this programme? In these trajectories, the concept of norm has proved to be a very flexible "hollow category", which can answer a wide array of research questions related to

[12] Remarkably, Roman Jakobson (Mukařovský's friend and colleague) not only fully considered (sound) film to be autonomous art in 1933, but he also began his argumentation with the idea of a *norm* (though intuitive and unsystematic): "We are witnessing the rise of a new art. It is growing in leaps and bound, detaching itself from the influence of the older arts and even beginning to influence them itself. It creates its own norms, its own laws, and then confidently rejects them" (Jakobson, 1981, p.161 [in Czech, 1933]).

[13] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson reacted to some of them in the retrospective on-line essay *The Classical Hollywood Cinema Twenty-Five Years Along*: http://www.davidbordwell.net/essays/classical.php (cit. 24th December 2019).

historical poetics of film style and narrative. In other words, we have shifted the focus of the analysis from (a) the level of subjects of discussion or subjects of research to (b) the level of conceptual tools used. It allowed us to concentrate on the more general explanatory possibilities of the concept of a norm as a research tool.

Furthermore, this leads us to a more general question: How can we formulate our own research projects of historical poetics on the base of these observations? Yes, such a question could undoubtedly lead to a separate article. I am more interested in the role that *a* classical Hollywood cinema as *the* aesthetic norm can or should play in these projects, instead. We can say that *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* book was the result of consistent bottom-up empirical research, and as such followed the demands that Bordwell and Thompson pushed forward in the 1980s. Admittedly, we could ask to what extent its strict "bottom-up-ness" represents *the research story* and to what extent *the research process*. Nevertheless, there is no reason not to believe that the majority of Bordwell, Thompson and Staiger's findings and conclusions came from the rigorous primary research of a large sample of aesthetic and non-aesthetic material.

What is remarkable in this respect is the methodological as well as the rhetorical operation that David Bordwell made "outside" *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*. That is to say, the concept of norm also played a significant role in his following book *Narration in the Fiction Film*, which he wrote after *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*. The third part of *Narration in the Fiction Film*, entitled "Historical Modes of Narration", can be considered to be a kind of a sequel to *The Classical Hollywood Cinema.* Most importantly, from the conclusions that Thompson, Staiger and he made in this book on classical Hollywood cinema as *the long-standing aesthetic norm of the studio system*, Bordwell has *de facto* made the *global aesthetic norm*: "In fictional filmmaking, one mode of narration has achieved predominance. Whether we call it mainstream, dominant, or classical cinema we intuitively recognize an ordinary, easily comprehensible movie when we see it. Our survey of narrational modes can properly start with this Classical tradition, since it relies on the strongest schemata and the most classicism: Hollywood studio filmmaking of the years 1917 to 1960" (Bordwell, 1985, p. 156). Bordwell implicitly develops here the assumption we find earlier in his book on Carl Theodor Dreyer: "By 1926 Hollywood's conception of a film dominated most of the world. Other conceptions were minority options, perceived and judged in relation to American practice. If we construct a model of narrative structure in classical Hollywood filmmaking, salient aspects of Dreyer's early work stand out sharply" (Bordwell, 1981A, p. 25).

In both cases, we can see a top-down approach to the concept of norm. That is to say, Bordwell builds on the assumption that if Hollywood production has dominated in overseas distribution[14], its stylistic and narrative techniques somewhat automatically began to form a paradigm of options preferred by filmmakers there. In other words, whereas in the case of Hollywood, the incoming artistic norms were promptly *assimilated* by classical Hollywood aesthetic norm (see above), in other cinemas it was just the classical Hollywood film as an incoming artistic norm which more or less *assimilates* aesthetic norms there. However, why should that be?

Elsewhere, concerning the historical poetics of style and narrative of Czech cinema, I proposed my own concept of so-called *regional cinema*: that is, a set of feature films produced primarily in a particular region and primarily for this region without precluding its ambitions to reach out of the region (Kokeš, forthcoming). It is an admittedly pragmatic concept, designed for a purpose as it takes into account issues and questions linked to a tradition of the poetics of cinema. Czech cinema has been predominantly regional, and its export ambition has been modest. At least concerning the silent period (which I have already analysed), the influence of classical Hollywood artistic norms was neither global nor universally assimilative facing regional aesthetic norms. It does not mean that Czech filmmakers in any sense intentionally rebelled against Hollywood artistic norms. We can rather observe long-term regional continuities of aesthetic norms (or even parallel sets of aesthetic norms). These continuities have their own causes and their own historical explanations. Yes, Hollywood artistic norms could have influenced some of the creative options preferred by Czech filmmakers, but many others were not influenced by them. What is guaranteed, by the top-down application of *classical (Hollywood) norm* as the universal set of international aesthetic standards, is that we will only learn very little about specificities or even contexts of aesthetic norms of a given regional production. It is because techniques that are typical for classical Hollywood norms gain prominence at the expense of the techniques typical for this regional production (Kokeš, forthcoming).

So if we are asking what role the classical Hollywood cinema as *the* aesthetic norm can or should play in our own historical poetics projects, my answer would be somewhat reluctant, especially if such a project is not going to be an analy-

[14] Moreover, it is also not as much unequivocal as it is usually supposed to be. It was demonstrated, for example, by Joseph Garncarz in the article *Germany Goes Global: Challenging the Theory of Hollywood's Dominance on International Markets*, in which he showed based on the example of German film distribution that at least in its case Hollywood films did not reach stable *popularity* until the 1980s (Garncarz, 2008, pp. 37–48).

sis of Hollywood[15]. However, even if we ask about *the influence* of the so-called classical norm, it should be regarded that the level of analysis in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* was quite high in order to understand and explain the pretty complex system of relations, horizontally as well as vertically. Bordwell writes, they "aimed to bring out the norms or implicit standards that Hollywood filmmakers as a community practiced. We did try to suggest that these norms formed a set of options, a paradigm from which a filmmaker might pick. […] It's nonetheless fair to say that we emphasized the menu over the meal" (Bordwell, Staiger, Thompson, 2010). In other words, they wanted to analyse and explain classical Hollywood cinema bottom-up as a system which is *unique* in these aspects. So why should we suppose that these norms and implicit standards of this complex relationship in this community should be plausible as an explanative background to systems with different communities? Well, maybe it is, maybe the system of norms is something that almost everybody shares or at least would like to share in the sense Bordwell suggests in the citation above. However, in this case, we can cite his own argument he used against applications of Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* to Hollywood films:

> "Propp set out to differentiate, by necessary and sufficient conditions, a specific class of tales. To the extent that his conclusions are valid for other classes, the features he specifies cannot demarcate this class. If we make Propp successful in describing most or all narrative structures, then he fails to distinguish the wondertale as a genre. He cannot succeed in both. Now if he aims to define the specificity of the wondertale and fails, there is no reason to assume that he has successfully described something else and thus no reason to take his scheme as a model of analysis. If I seek to differentiate owls from doves, and I err so thoroughly that all my claims hold good for ostriches and penguins too, it does not follow that I have accidentally provided an accurate description of the entire bird kingdom. It is at least as likely that I am wrong on all counts. If Propp is wrong about his domain of material, then there is no compelling reason to believe that he is inadvertently right about anything else" (Bordwell, 1988A, p. 12).

To sum up, the concept of norm appears to be an extremely useful and flexible research tool of writing a stylistic and narrative history of cinema, but it is such a tool only if it is reached by bottom-up research. In order to understand aesthetic norms related to the poetics of any area of cinema, we should begin with an original analysis of its own material and thus develop its own premises,

[15] Besides that, there are other, more or less parallel, explanations for comparable problems to the explanation of Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson. Cf. for example Altman, 1992A; Maltby, 2003; Salt, 2006, 2009; Elsaesser, 2012.

categories and methods. It will only be after we understand these aesthetic norms and explain them in particular empirical conditions (concerning other norms) that it will become possible to compare our results with discoveries about aesthetic norms acquired by someone else (cf. Kokeš, forthcoming). If we follow these principles, the concept of norm can surely be enormously helpful to us – as well as the knowledge of the research decisions made by the proponents of neoformalist poetics when they used the concept of norm as such a tool[16].

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Norms, Forms and Roles: Notes on the Concept of Norm (Not Just) in Neoformalist Poetics of Cinema

Norm as a tool of structural analysis and writing of aesthetically based history is a concept designed by Czech structuralist Jan Mukařovský. For several decades, the American film scholars David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson have been handling this notion. After a review of the original concept, the article follows three main goals: (1) The broadest aim is to reconstruct specific

roles the concept played in the process of establishing the so-called neoformalist poetics approach. By returning to Mukařovský's starting points, we should be able to more clearly understand how his concept of norm was employed and transformed by neoformalist poeticians in order to solve the problems of film studies as an academic discipline on the one hand and problems in formulating concrete research projects on the other. (2) The more particular goal is to point out certain shifts in neoformalist poeticians' handling of the concept of norm after they formulated the classical Hollywood cinema model. The concept of norm was initially used by them as a tool for bottom-up research of the stylistic history of cinema, as a hollow category for its unbiased explanation. However, consequently it has also become a somewhat filled category applied rather top-down as an interpretative background for assessing its alternatives. (3) The final goal is to answer the question why this re-assessment and interrogation of roles played by norm in neoformalist poetics matters now. By returning to the original concept of norm and by the treatise of its changing functions for film study, the article aims to remind us of the usefulness and flexibility of this research tool. As is suggested in the last part of the article, we still know too little about historical poetics of so-called regional cinemas. If we want to understand them properly, the concept of norm is highly worthwhile – but only if is reached by bottom-up research as the hollow category for the unbiased explanation of certain cinematic phenomena.